

Weekly Column for February 14, 2008

Happy Valentine's Day Everyone!

Earlier this week we held a groundbreaking for a very exciting project in the heart of downtown Troy.

Thanks to a collaboration between the City of Troy, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and a number of other entities, beginning in August 2009, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute students will have a new campus housing option in downtown Troy. This project, launched on Tuesday, will convert the former Best Western Rensselaer Inn into a residence hall to house Rensselaer undergraduate students.

We have talked for many years about bringing more residents into downtown. It is one of the reasons my administration wants to move City Hall, and it is the basis for many of the exciting announcements we have had in the past four years. More people downtown means more business, means more tax base.

One of the most exciting aspects of this project is that the new residence hall will be situated at the bottom of the Rensselaer Approach. For those of you that do not know, the approach is the granite staircase that symbolizes the connection between the City of Troy and the Institute. Unfortunately, it has never been much more than symbolism, until now.

I want to thank RPI for taking the initiative to make this project happen in downtown Troy, as well as a number of other people that made it happen, including: New York State Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno, Rensselaer County Executive Kathleen Jimino, and the project development team, which includes Blitman Building Corp., Columbia Development Companies, and BBL Construction Services.

The City of Troy Zoning Board of Appeals and Planning Board have already approved the project. Despite rumors out there to the contrary, the project will continue to leave the property on the Troy city and school tax rolls.

The building will undergo a complete renovation and modernization, including replacement of the building structure and roof, installation of new safety systems, and upgrading of interior furniture and fixtures.

The existing hotel has 154 rooms and a total square footage of 78,500. In the new residence hall, 148 rooms will be used for student occupancy, and there will be an apartment for live-in professional staff and four rooms for resident assistants. All of the rooms will have private bathrooms, and there will be a food service facility on site. The building also will be used during the summer for Rensselaer programs and conferences.

An added bonus to this project is that on-site parking will help alleviate congestion in campus parking lots and in on street parking in the neighborhoods around campus, and Rensselaer will provide continuous shuttle bus service to campus. The residence hall, which will only be used for sophomores, juniors, and seniors, is expected to be ready for occupancy in August 2009.

It is an exciting project to say the least!

Have a great weekend. Please stay warm and dry!

Harry J Tutunjian
Mayor of Troy